DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 289 FL 027 740

AUTHOR	Jeon, Mihyon
TITLE	Closing the Advising Session.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	20p.; In: Working Papers in Educational Linguistics, 2003; see FL 027 736.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Research (143)
JOURNAL CIT	Working Papers in Educational Linguistics; v18 n2 p89-106 2003
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Communicative Competence (Languages); Conversational Language Courses; English (Second Language); Faculty Advisers; Higher Education; *Language Proficiency; Second Language Learning
IDENTIFIERS	*Conversation

ABSTRACT

This study investigates closing patterns for an institutional conversation in an ELP (English Language Program) at a university in the United States, noting the relationship between the closing patterns of the participants and their level of proficiency in English. By indicating that ESL learners, especially beginners, face difficulty in closing conversations successfully, this study draws attention to a need to provide appropriate instruction on closings. This study also demonstrates that as ESL students' proficiency level increases, their conversational closings become less marked. Finally, it suggests what to teach ESL learners to help them in performing unmarked closings in advising sessions. Instruction on the four subsections of this type of closing would be useful for ESL students. Information about marked and unmarked closings would help them to terminate conversations felicitously. (Contains 12 references.) (Author/SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 478 289

Closing the Advising Session

Mihyon Jeon

University of Pennsylvania

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Cheryl Donnelly

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

FL027740

2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Closing the Advising Session

Mihyon Jeon

University of Pennsylvania

This study investigates closing patterns for an institutional conversation in an ELP (English Language Program) at a university in the United States. What is the relationship between the closing patterns of the participants and their level of proficiency in English? By indicating that ESL learners, especially beginners, face difficulty in closing conversations successfully, this study draws attention to a need to provide appropriate instruction on closings. Second, this study also demonstrates that as ESL students' proficiency level increases, their conversational closings become less marked. Finally, it suggests what to teach ESL learners to help them in performing unmarked closings in advising sessions. Instruction on the four subsections of this type of closing would be useful for ESL students. Information about marked and unmarked closings would help them to terminate conversations felicitously.

Introduction

The current study aims to investigate closing patterns for an institutional conversation in an ELP (English Language Program) at a university in the United States. The conversational closings that will be investigated have been realized between representatives of the institution, who are native English speakers, and their students, who are non-native English speakers. For the non-native speakers of English, it is not a simple task to close a conversation in English. Knowing how to close a conversation in their native languages does not guarantee success in English, because conversational closings are culture-specific (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig 1992: 93). Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan and Reynolds (1991: 6) argue that learners of English are sometimes unable to close conversations in culturally and situationally sensitive ways. Even for advanced learners of English, it might not be easy to close conversations by initiating a closing or responding properly when their interlocutor initiates a closing.

As a non-native speaker of English, my own experience related to conversational closings might be an appropriate example of the difficulty which non-native speakers of English encounter in closing conversations. I was talking on the phone with one of my classmates whose native language is English. I had initiated the phone call for the purpose of finding

out some information related to course work. After fifteen minutes of conversation and a few topic shifts, my classmate said, "Okay." I interpreted this as a signal for both finishing the current topic and starting the next topic and, therefore, I started to talk about another topic by using a phrase, "By the way." After some time, he said again, "Okay," and I initiated a new topic by saying, "By the way." This pattern was repeated a few more times and finally he said, "I gotta go," and we closed the conversation by a terminal exchange. After the phone conversation, I felt that something was not quite right. My response to the preclosing signal, "Okay," was not appropriate, because I had misinterpreted it.

Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991: 6) suggest that closings, if overly extended, may make learners appear rude by making them seem "hard to get rid of." In the opposite case, closings that are too brief also make learners seem rude by making them seem "abrupt." These are examples when social norms of interactions in a speech community are broken. People tend to misinterpret these violations as unfriendliness, rudeness, or over familiarity as proposed by Wolfson (1983: 62-3).

In order to lessen the risk of appearing uncooperative or rude, nonnative speakers of English need to be aware of the functions and patterns of conversational closings in English. Instruction may be an effective way to help learners to develop their pragmatic awareness about conversational closings. When the previously mentioned telephone call was made, I had formally studied English for over ten years and had been living in the United States for two and a half years. However, I had not been taught explicitly how to close conversations in English. Instruction about closing conversations might have helped me to be aware of this specific speech act and to respond to my interlocutor's closing initiation more successfully.

The effectiveness of formal instruction regarding "the social rules of language use" in classrooms was demonstrated in Billmyer's research on the performance of compliments by ESL learners who had been instructed on how to compliment (1990: 285-6). Wolfson argued that

> the acquisition of sociolinguistic rules can be greatly facilitated by teachers who have the necessary information at their command and who have the sensitivity to use their knowledge in order to guide students and help them to interpret values and patterns which they would otherwise have difficulty in interpreting. (1989: 31)

In order to instruct ESL learners in using pragmatically appropriate English in a target speech community, the selection of speech acts for instruction should be considered early on. The ways in which these speech acts are carried out among native English speakers should also be identified. Even though there might not be critically important speech

acts for instruction, selection of the speech acts for instruction should be made according to both the ESL learners' needs or interests and the possible types of English contact which they may face (Bardovi-Harlig et al. 1991: 5). In order to find out ESL learners' needs and to identify areas of difficulty in their English use, their conversational or written language use should be collected and analyzed through observation or through recording spontaneous conversations performed by ESL learners (Bardovi-Harlig et al. 1991: 5). Little research has been conducted on ESL learners' English language use regarding conversational closings. As a result, there is little instruction about conversational closings, even though ESL learners often have difficulties in closing conversations successfully.

This paper contributes to an understanding of ESL learners' attempts at English conversational closings by analyzing the conversational closings made by ESL learners and their advisors, who are native speakers of English, in advising sessions in an ELP. The relationship between the participants' English language proficiency and their conversational closing patterns is investigated. By implication, this study draws attention to conversational closings in instructing ESL learners.

Theoretical Framework

The current study draws on the work by Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992) on conversational closings of the academic advising sessions. Their study in turn draws on both the study of conversational closings by Schegloff and Sacks (1973) and the studies of the structure of institutional discourse by Agar (1985) and Erickson and Shultz (1982). Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992: 94) argue that the academic interview in their study is an institutional discourse whose structure is determined by the needs of the institution or something else. Agar (1985: 149) claims that the structure of all institutional discourse consists of the following phases: diagnoses, directives, and reports. In the first phase, the institutional representative diagnoses the client – the reason the client is in contact with the institution. In the directives phase, "the institutional representative directs the client to do certain things or directs an organization to do certain things to or for the client" (Agar 1985: 149). A report is the summary of the institutional discourse that the institutional representative produces.

The specific realization of this structure for the advising session in this study is defined as the following:

OPENING

A student comes in and takes a seat with greetings.
An advisor asks for the student's history.

DIAGNOSIS

The student requests a course change.
The student provides the reasons for the request.

DIRECTIVE

The advisor provides information on the courses appropriate for the student's needs.
The advisor also explains how course-change requests can be workedout.

REPORT WRITING

The student fills out the course-change request form with the advisor's help.

CLOSING

Shutting Down
Preclosing
Thanking (Expression of Gratitude)
Terminal Exchange

The "Opening " and "Closing" serve as the initial and final phases in addition to the three phases suggested by Agar, whose work does not focus on the openings and closings.

In their pioneering study of American English closings from natural telephone-conversation data, Schegloff and Sack (1973) analyze ways in which two interlocutors negotiate the placement of the end of the last topic and close conversations. They argue that ending sequences employ adjacency-pair formats (1973: 297). An adjacency pair refers to "a sequence of two related utterances by two different speakers" (Richards, Platt, & Platt 1992: 7). Adjacency pairs have the following features: the length of two utterances, adjacent positioning of component utterances, and the production of each utterance by different speakers (Schegloff & Sack 1973: 295). In order to close a conversation successfully, an initiation of a closing by a speaker, the first part of the adjacency pair, should be understood and accepted by his or her interlocutor and should be successfully answered. This response will complete the adjacency pair and will achieve a successful closing.

While Schegloff and Sack focus on the closings of naturally occurring phone conversations, Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992: 99) focus on the closings of academic advising sessions, which they consider to be an institutional discourse. Analyzing thirty-one academic advising interviews by both native and highly advanced non-native speakers, they argue that institutional conversations differ from natural conversations in terms of their closings. The closings of the academic advising session can not be reopened in the same ways in which the closings of natural con-

versations can be reopened, as described by Schegloff and Sacks. Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig argue that "for the monotopical advising interview, exactly what cannot occur felicitously in the closing sections is reinvocation of previously negotiated matters" (1992: 101). They report that native-speaker interviews are not reopened at all or are followed by highly limited reopening talk, while some nonnative speakers reopen their closings by reinvocating previously negotiated topics, resulting in infelicitous closings.

The study by Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig sheds light on the closing of institutional conversations by demonstrating that institutional conversational closings are different from the closings of naturally occurring conversations. However, in their study, the relationship between non-native speakers' English proficiency and their closing patterns in their institutional conversations was not investigated since Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig aimed to find evidence that the closings of institutional conversations differ from those of naturally occurring conversations. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the patterns of the conversational closings produced specifically by non-native speakers, whose English proficiencies vary from low beginner to advanced, in advising sessions related to course-changing requests.

The main purposes of this study is not only to describe closing patterns for the advising session related to course-changing requests, but also to investigate the developmental patterns of closing according to the proficiency in English of the students. In this way, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the second-language acquisition of the speech act of closing and to shed light on educational practice by illuminating pedagogical implications of research on conversational closings. The following research questions are proposed:

1. What are the closing patterns of the ELP students for advising sessions related to course changing requests?
2. What is the relationship between the closing patterns of the par-ticipants and their level of proficiency in English?

Methods

Setting and Participants

The setting in which the conversational closings were conducted was an office of the ELP at an American university. All sessions were scheduled between the ELP students and their advisors with the purpose of advising the ELP students in their course-changing requests. In each session, the advisor had received the student's permission to record the session after having learned the academic purpose of the recording. The data collection was conducted during the academic year of 1998 and 1999

under the direction of the head of the institution.

Four native English-speaking advisors in the institution and thirty-two non-native English learners participated in the study. Some of the advisors had more than five years of experience advising in the program, while some had only two years. The linguistic backgrounds of the ELP students were Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, and Thai. These students were classified into the following three proficiency levels: level I - beginner and low intermediate (n=10), level II - middle intermediate (n=9), and level III - high intermediate and advanced (n=13), according to their MPT (Michigan Proficiency Test) placement results. No information was collected on the participants' length of time in the U.S. Length of time in the U.S. is not considered a significant variable for the current study because this study focuses only on the relationship between the participants' English language proficiency and conversational closing patterns.

Data Collection and Analysis

Originally forty-eight sessions were tape recorded and transcribed. Thirty-two sessions from the transcribed data were selected for data analysis; the others, which did not have any closings because the tapes ended, were discarded. These thirty-two sessions were analyzed in terms of their closing structures. First, I identify a closing section from each of the thirty-two transcripts. Each closing section contains the following subsections: a shutting down, a preclosing, a thanking, and a terminal exchange. A "shutting down" refers to an utterance or utterances serving to finish up a previously mentioned topic. Second, a "preclosing" means a way of initiating a closing, such as "Well," "O.K.," and "So" (Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 303). A "thanking" is not considered to be a subsection of a closing by Schegloff and Sacks (1973); however, this study includes thanking as one of the subsections because a thanking has a "ritual" role in closing service encounters (Rubin 1983, cited in Aston 1995: 59). A student who has been helped by an advisor is supposed to express gratitude to the advisor. Finally, a terminal exchange consists of an adjacency pair containing "Bye," "Good-bye," "See you," and so on. A closing section consisting of all these four subsections is considered a complete closing while one with fewer subsections than a full closing is classified as an abbreviated closing. A closing section that has a "reopening" or "making an arrangement" will be categorized as an extended closing. A "reopening" refers to invocation of a previously negotiated topic, and "making an arrangement" means arranging later meetings. The discussion of the structure of closings above is shown in Table 1.

After identifying the closing sections, regardless of the length of each closing section, I identify it as marked or unmarked. The concept of "markedness" has been adopted from markedness theory. That theory

proposes that in the languages of the world certain elements are more basic, natural, and frequent (unmarked) than others, which are referred to as "marked" (Richards et al. 1992: 220-221). The concept of markedness has been discussed particularly within generative phonology (e.g., Chomsky & Halle 1968). In the current study, markedness in conversational closing is context-specifically defined. That is, the patterns of marked closings are determined within the context of the English Language Program in the United States where pragmatic rules of English are customary standards which students in the program should learn and want to learn.

Table 1
Types of Closings

Abbreviated Closing	Complete Closing	Extended Closing
Missing any of the four subsections	Shutting Down Preclosing Thanking Terminal Exchange	Shutting Down Preclosing Reopening or Making Arrangements Thanking Terminal Exchange

The following describes the conditions for unmarked and marked closings in this study. Unmarked closings are ones terminated in the ways which native speakers of English perform and perceive as natural, similar to the "felicitous" closings of Hartford and Bardovi-Halig (1992: 104). Marked closings are those that are terminated "infelicitously" or unsuccessfully. Even though there exists a parallel between the concept of unmarked/marked closings and felicitous/infelicitous closings, the conditions for unmarked/marked closings are here determined context-specifically. First, if a closing section is too abrupt - for example, if it contains only a terminal exchange or a thanking - it is identified as marked. Second, in an extended closing, if a reopening is made by the advisor and is responded to successfully by the student, the closing section is classified as an unmarked closing. If a reopening made by a student is a reinvocation of previously negotiated matters, the closing is considered marked, following Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992: 106). Third, all complete closings are coded as unmarked.

Results and Discussion

In the results of this study, about half of the closings (fifteen out of thirty-two) were extended, one-third of the closings (ten out of thirty-two) were complete, and six were abbreviated.

An extended closing has a reopening in addition to a shutting down, a preclosing, a thanking, and a terminal exchange. Two examples of extended closings follow:

Excerpt 1 Unmarked Extended Closing

Male Level I (Beginner, Low Intermediate) Student

1 Shutting down	S: Mm hmm, after three o'clock pm?
2	A: Yes, //in your //mail folder.
3	S: //uh huh //mail folder.
4 Preclosing	S: Okay.
5	A: Okay.
6	S: Okay, I see// I see, Okay.
7 Reopening	A: //That's all you just have to tell me,
8	that. (1.0) You already seem to speak well.
9	S: Already to speak,
10	A: You already// seem to speak well.
11	S: //uh huh, oh really?
12	A: Mm hmm.
13	S: Uh I exercise to speak// this//
14	A: //yeah //yeah
15	A: I'm glad you came to our school.
16 Thanking	S: Mm hmm thank you.
17 Terminal exchange	A: Bye-bye.
18	S: See you.

The excerpt above has the following components of the closing section in this order: a shutting down, a preclosing, a reopening, a thanking, and the terminal exchange. The advisor (in line 7) initiates the reopening, providing the student a compliment on his English proficiency. The student repeats a part of the advisor's compliment, indicating that he may not understand it. Noticing his incomprehension, the advisor (in line 10) repeats the same compliment, and the student finally understands it. The topic of the reopening is not the matter that has been previously negotiated, but instead functions to build a relationship, which is also illustrated in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 2 Unmarked Extended Closing

Male Level II (Middle-intermediate) Student

1 Shutting down	A: When you talk to her, tell her to talk to me.
2 Preclosing	S: O//kay.
3	A: //Okay?

4	Reopening	S: What's your name?
5		A: Alice.
6		S: Alice?
7		A: Yeah.
8	Preclosing	S: Okay.
9		A: Okay?
10	Terminal exchange	S: Okay. Bye-bye, Alice.
11	Thanking	S: Thank you very much.
12		A: Hum-hmm.

This extended closing section includes a reopening initiated by the student, while the extended closing in Excerpt 1 has the reopening initiated by the advisor. The student here asks the advisor's name in the first line of the reopening. Because of the highly formulaic format of the advising sessions for course-change requests in this institution, the advisors' names are not often introduced to the students. In contrast, the students' names are often required by the advisors in order to fill out the course-request form. The current excerpt is from an advising session that started with the advisor's question, "Why did you want to see me today?" Throughout the session, the advisor's name is not given to the student. The student's initiation is appropriately followed by the advisor's response. In the terminal exchange, the student uses the information that he has obtained from the reopening by saying "Bye-bye, Alice." The reopening serves a relationship-building function.

In addition, the student's asking for the advisor's name seems to be necessary, because the advisor has asked him, "When you talk to her (the student's teacher), tell her to talk to me." It is worth noting that this closing session has two preclosings, one before the reopening (lines 2 and 3) and the other before the terminal exchange (lines 8 and 9). In addition, the terminal exchange (line 10) precedes the thanking (lines 11 and 12), which indicates that the order between a thanking and a terminal exchange may be reversed. These two extended closings are coded as unmarked because both reopening sections, regardless of the initiators, are well responded to by the interlocutors and the topics have not been discussed in the previous sections of the session.

Complete closings, ten of thirty-two, contain all four subsections. For example, the following closing consists of all four subsections without any reopenings:

Excerpt 3 Unmarked Complete Closing

Female Level III (Advanced) Student

1	Shutting down	A: Okay, so you could, you need to continue to go to
2		Academic Speaking tomorrow and Wednesday and

3		then um Wednesday afternoon look in your mailbox
4		for your new class schedule.
5	Preclosing	Okay?
6		S: Okay.
7		A: Bye, //great.
8	Thanking	S: //Thank you very much.
9		A: Thanks a lot for coming. (1.0) //Okay.
10		S: //Thank you.
11	Terminal exchange	A: Bye-bye.
12		S: Bye-bye. Have a great day.
13		A: Thanks, you too.
14		S: (3.0) Bye-bye.

In this excerpt, the advisor (lines 1-4) finishes up what she has previously mentioned. This shutting down is followed by a preclosing initiated by the advisor (line 5) and responded to by the student (line 6). The advisor's first attempt to close the session (line 7) is taken up by the student's thanking (line 8). In the terminal exchange initiated by the advisor (line 11), the student repeats the farewell three times (lines 12 and 14). This may imply that the student wishes to show a friendly attitude to the advisor.

Finally abbreviated closings, six out of thirty-two, include less than all four subsections as illustrated in the following two excerpts:

Excerpt 4 Unmarked Abbreviated Closing

Female Level II (Middle Intermediate) Student

1	Shutting down	S: Yes but maybe for the the//next next session.
2		A: //next session, yeah definitely, definitely.
3	Thanking	S: Thank you very much again.
4		A: You're welcome.
5	Terminal exchange	S: It's a good day, bye-bye.
6		A: Bye-bye.

This closing does not contain a preclosing, but even so, it is unmarked and serves as a felicitous closing. The utterance (line 5), "It's a good day," may mean that the student wishes to express that things are going well for her. Otherwise, it is possible that the utterance is an interlanguage form meaning "Have a nice day" since it appears in the terminal exchange.

The following closing lacks a shutting down, a preclosing, and a thanking.

Excerpt 5 Marked Abbreviated Closing

Male Level I (Beginner, Low Intermediate) Student

1		A: Have you talked to your teacher?
2		S: Yes.
3		A: And what does your teacher say.
4		S: Say? uh xxx
5		A: Mm hmm what did she say?
6		S: She said you will change your class.
7		A: Okay, I will talk to your teacher.
8		S: Yes (sounds of picking up schoolbag)
9	Terminal exchange	A: Good// bye.
10		S: //Bye.

In this closing, the student picks up his bag without giving any chance for the advisor to provide any moment for preclosing. Neither does the student provide a thanking. This marked closing consists only of the terminal exchange - very abbreviated.

Table 2 presents a distribution of the types of closings according to the participants' English proficiency level. Thirty percent of the closings made by the beginners and the low intermediates are abbreviated, ten percent of them are complete, and sixty percent are extended. Forty-four percent of the closings by the middle-intermediate level students are abbreviated, twenty-two percent complete, and thirty-three extended. None of the high-intermediate and advanced students make an abbreviated closing, while fifty-four percent of them make complete closings and forty-six extended.

Table 2

Number of Closings According to Students' English Proficiency Level

	Abbreviated Closing	Complete Closing	Ended Closing	Total
Level I	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	6 (60%)	10
Level II	4 (44%)	2 (22%)	3 (33%)	9
Level III	0	7 (54%)	6 (46%)	13
Total	7 (22%)	10 (31%)	15 (47%)	32

As far as abbreviated closings are concerned, the frequency of these abbreviated closings decreases as the students' English proficiency

increases. In the case of complete closings, an opposite pattern emerges - the frequency of these complete closings increases as the students' English proficiency increases. The percentage of extended closings (60%) made by the beginner and low-intermediate students ranks highest among those three proficiency groups, followed by the advanced (48%) and the middle-intermediate (33%). This result is not consistent with a common assumption that conversations performed by beginners tend to be shorter than ones by advanced learners. However, the advising sessions in this study were conducted with ELP students and native English-speaking advisors. It is necessary to analyze who initiates a reopening or an arrangement for the next meeting which extends a closing, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3
Number of Marked and Unmarked Extended Closings

	Extended Closings		Total
	Initated by Advisor	Initiated by Student	
Level I	2 (1 unmarked, 1 marked)	4 (2 unmarked, 2 marked)	6
Level II	2 (1 unmarked, 1 marked)	1 (1 unmarked)	3
Level III	5 (4 unmarked, 1 marked)	1 (1 unmarked)	6

This table demonstrates that four out of the six extended closings of the beginner and low intermediate students are initiated by the students, while only one extended closing from each of the higher level groups is initiated by the student.

Not only the initiator of a reopening but also the effect of the reopening should be considered: Does the reopening contribute to the performance of an unmarked closing section? While neither of the extended closings initiated by the intermediate and advanced level students is classified as marked, two out of the four extended closings initiated by the beginning students are classified as marked.

The following excerpt illustrates an example of a marked closing containing a reopening initiated by a student:

Excerpt 6 Marked Extended Closing

Female Level I (Beginner, Low Intermediate) Student

1	Shutting down	A: This is the situation at this time.
2		S: mm. Ok I understand.
3	Thanking	S: Thank you very //much.
4		A: //You're welcome.
5	Reopening	S: Uh I think I wanna talk to, uh, Kay.
6		A: I will advise Kay as well.
7		S: Okay.
8		A: Mm hmm
9	Terminal Exchange	S: Bye.

In this closing, the student reopens the closing section by mentioning, "Uh I think I wanna talk to, uh, Kay." In the directive stage of the session, she has indicated her desire to take some advanced courses, even though she has not passed the previously taken courses. The advisor explains that the student cannot take any higher-level courses until she passes the course that she has failed, as shown in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 7 Directive Stage

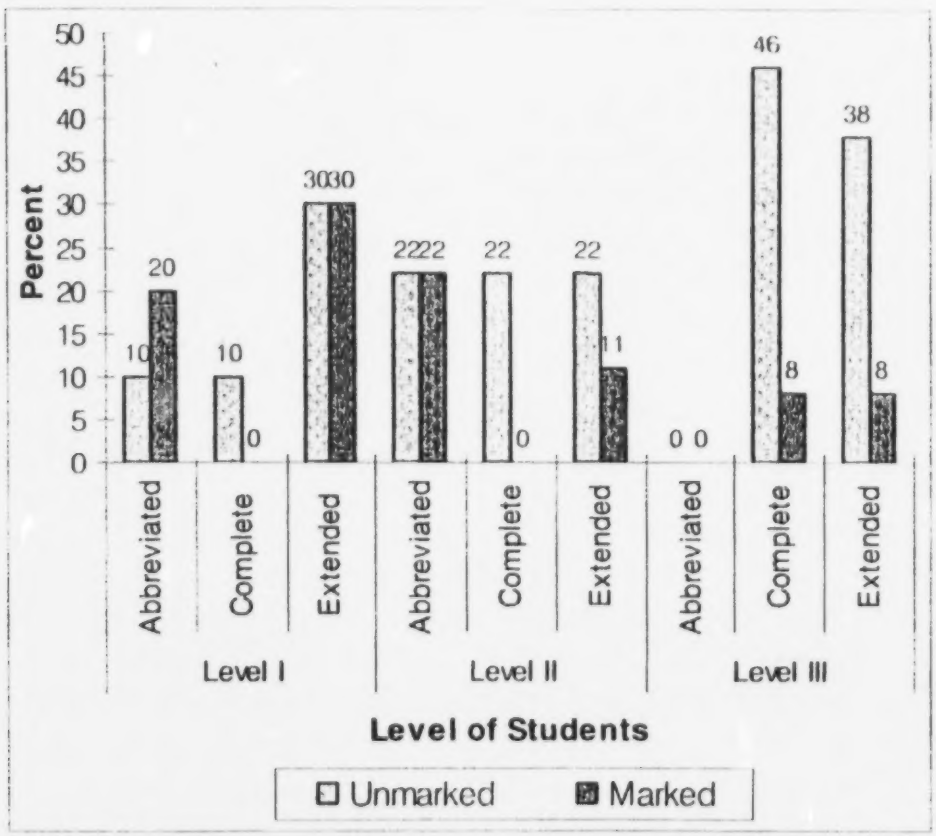
Female Level I (Beginner, Low Intermediate) Student

1	S:	There's no way to take the other elective class?
2	A:	I'm afraid not.
3	S:	Humm, no, no way? No?
4	A:	No.
5	S:	I can't talk my- to my teacher, Kay, or to my new teacher?
6	A:	You can talk to all of your teachers, but you must take this class before you can go to the next level.

The student seems to believe that she might take the other classes if her teacher, Kay, allows, but the advisor (lines 5 and 6) makes it clear that the student's talking to her teacher would not change the situation. In the closing section (in line 5 of excerpt 6), the student reopens the topic that the advisor has already mentioned. The advisor does not accept the student's reopening, implying that the student will not have any chance to take the other course even though she talks to her teacher, Kay, because the advisor will advise Kay of the situation as well. Since the reopening made by the student contains a topic that has been already discussed before the closing, this closing session is coded as marked.

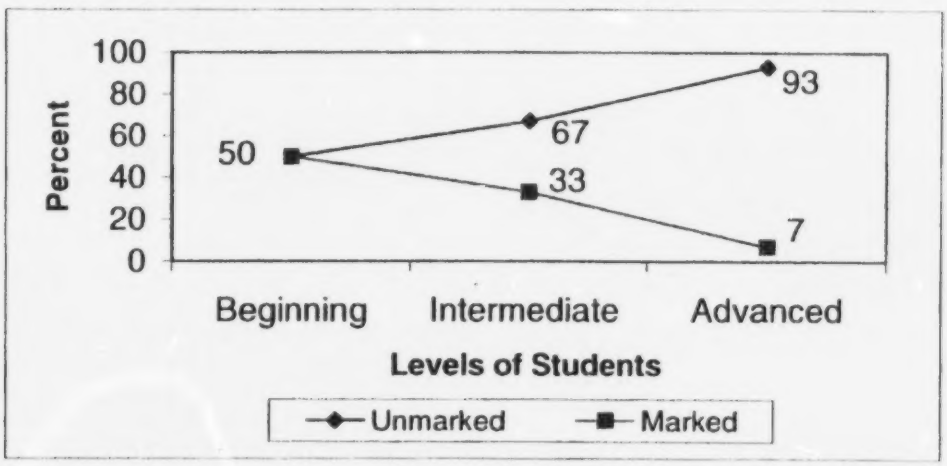
Figure 1 presents a distribution of the types of closings made by the beginning, intermediate, and advanced students in terms of their markedness or unmarkedness. Fifty percent (five out of ten) of all of the closings by the beginning level students are marked. Two of the five marked closings are abbreviated and three of them are extended. Compared to the closings by the beginning-level students, the closings by the intermediate students are more frequently unmarked. Thirty-three percent of the closings (three out of nine) are marked. Two of the three marked closings by the intermediate students are abbreviated and one is extended. The closings by the advanced students are the ones most frequently unmarked, and none of the closings are abbreviated. Eighty-four percent of the closings (eleven out of thirteen) are unmarked.

Figure 1
Closing Patterns



As illustrated in Figure 2, as the students' English proficiency level increases, their closing patterns approach unmarked closings. Fifty percent of the closings made by the beginning students are marked as are 67 percent of those by the intermediate students and 84 percent of those by the advanced students. This high percentage of unmarked closings by the advanced-level students may have originated not only from their high English proficiency but also from the fact that many advanced students may have had prior experience in similar advising sessions. The sessions end very predictably because they are "monotopical" (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig 1992: 115) in character. In all of the advising sessions, the main topic of discussion focuses on course-change requests; the ELP students want to change one or more courses and need to get advice about how to do it. Few advising sessions addressed other topics. In addition, the procedure of the sessions is highly formulaic. The students are required to fill out a course-change request form during the report stage, which is followed by the closing section. This monotopical and formulaic nature of the specific advising session might help the students with prior experience to know when to finish the sessions; the same advanced students might have difficulties in conducting successful closings in other situations.

Figure 2
Marked/Unmarked Closings



Summary and Implications

This study aimed to investigate the closing patterns for an institutional conversation in an ELP at a university in the United States. Thirty-two

closing sessions classified into the three proficiency levels were analyzed in terms of both the types and the markedness of the closings. Three types of closings - abbreviated, completed, and extended - emerged according to the presence or absence of the subsections of a closing: a shutting down, a preclosing, a thanking, and a terminal exchange. The findings demonstrated that about half of the closings (15 out of 32) were extended, one third of the closings (10 out of 32) completed, and 6 abbreviated.

The students' closing patterns vary according to their English proficiency level. The frequency of the abbreviated closings decreased as the students' English proficiency increased, while the frequency of the completed closings increased as the students' English proficiency increased. The beginning students were the most frequent performers of an extended closing, followed by the advanced and then the intermediate students. Only half of the extended closings initiated by the beginning students were unmarked, while more of the extended closings initiated by both intermediate and advanced students tended to be unmarked As the students' English proficiency increased, their number of marked closings decreased.

In spite of these findings, this study has a few limitations and possible extensions. First of all, the total number of advising sessions investigated in this study is limited. More data at each proficiency level are needed in order to verify the findings of this study. Second, this study would benefit from any retrospective information provided by the participants. This information would enhance understanding of the closings of the advising sessions in terms of the participants' own perceptions about how the advising sessions should be closed. Third, in defining unmarked closings, more native baseline data would clarify the nature of unmarkedness in closings in academic advising sessions. Fourth, this study focuses on only closings in the advising sessions. However, second-language learners of English face other situations besides advising sessions in which they have to terminate a conversation successfully in English. Since conversational closings are context-specific other types of conversational closings may require second-language learners to have a different type of pragmatic competence. For example, when students terminate a conversation with their English-speaking friends, they may not need to express their gratitude. Thus, further research on other types of conversational closings is also needed.

Despite these limitations, this study may have some implications for language learning and teaching. First, by indicating that ESL learners, especially beginners, face difficulty in closing conversations successfully, this study draws attention to a need to provide appropriate instruction on closings. Second, by demonstrating that as ESL students' proficiency level increases, their conversational closings became less marked, this study suggests that performance of a specific speech act is learnable by

ESL speakers. Finally, the study suggests what to teach ESL learners to help them to perform an unmarked closing in an advising session. Instructions on the four subsections of this type of closing would be very useful for ESL students. Information about marked and unmarked closings would probably help them to terminate conversations felicitously.

Mihyon Jeon is a Ph.D. candidate in educational linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, bilingual education, discourse analysis, and second language acquisition.

E-mail: mijeon@dolphin.upenn.edu

References

Agar, M. (1985). Institutional discourse. *Text*, 5(3), 147-168.

Aston, G. (1995). Say 'Thank you': Some pragmatic constraints in conversational closings. *Applied Linguistics, 16 (1)*, 57-83.

Bardovi-Harlig, K., Hartford, B.A.S., Mahan-Taylor, R., Morgan M.J., & Reynolds, D. W. (1991). Developing pragmatic awareness: Closing the conversation. *ELT Journal, 45(1)*, 4-15.

Billmyer, K. (1990). *The effect of formal instruction on the development of sociolinguistic competence: The performance of compliments*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Chomsky, N., & Halle, M. (1968). *The sound pattern of English*. New York: Harper and Row.

Erickson, F., & Shultz, J. (1982). *The counselor as gatekeeper*. New York: Academic.

Hartford, B.S., & Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1992). Closing conversations: Evidence from the academic advising session. *Discourse Processes, 15*, 93-116.

Richards, J.C., Platt, J., & Platt, H. (1992 [1985]). *Dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. Essex, UK: Longman Group.

Rubin, J. (1983, March). The use of "Thank you." Paper presented at TESOL, Toronto.

Schegloff, E.A., & Sacks, H. (1973). Opening up closings. *Semiotica, 8*, 289-327.

Wolfson, N. (1983). Rules of speaking. In J. Richards & R. Schmidt. (Eds.) *Language and communication* (pp. 61-87)., London: Longman.

Wolfson, N. (1989). *Perspectives: Sociolinguistics and TESOL*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix

Transcription Conventions

'-'	unfinished utterance
'?'	rising intonation
'.'	falling intonation
','	pause or breath without marked intonation
'(1.0)'	silences
'//'	indicates simultaneous talk by two speakers, with one utterance represented on top of the other and the moment of overlap marked by two slashes
'xxx'	speech hard to discern

FL 027740

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

X	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").